31460

The Unitarian Christian

Vol. 14 SPRING, 1959 No. 3

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL 2

THE UNDERLYING THEOLOGY OF UNITARIAN PREACHING—*Robert W. Haney* 3

FUNCTIONAL MERGER FAVORED —*Lawrence Marvin Jaffa* 7

SOME INTANGIBLES IN THE QUESTION OF MERGER—*Albert F. Ziegler* 10

EDITORS MAIL BOX 12

A QUESTION ON THE PURPOSES OF MERGER—*Carl Bihldorff* 14

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING 14

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK 15

INTRODUCING OUR CONTRIBUTORS 16

EDITORIAL

IT is a fair question to ask why we keep Easter at all. Perhaps we should turn our backs on the curious and baffling myths and traditions that are part and parcel of Easter, dismiss them as bits of pious nonsense which we have outgrown. This is one solution to the Easter problem, albeit not a very thoughtful one. Or we might substitute for the Christian Easter the vague religious feelings of the pagan festival of Spring which celebrates the renewal of life upon the earth after the desolation of winter as some of our coreligionists are wont to do. We might solve the riddle of Easter, in short, by ignoring it—a familiar way of coping with problems that give themselves to no easy solution. But having granted these things there remains the uneasy suspicion that we have not confronted the issue of Easter at all. There is still the persistant question: Does life have any meaning beyond the perimeter of years and time? Or is the life of man a senseless episode that ends in nothingness? Does the postscript of your life and the lives of those whom you love ultimately spell extinction?

The English poet Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh: "You must know I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in such a nook of life as this." In a world of devastating separations, and bits and fragments that spell incompletion we can understand what Cowper meant by "such a nook of life as this." Can we believe that this is only a part, and that life does go on where friendships can unfold and love can be perfected and unfinished tasks can find their fulfillment?

There are, admittedly, not a few men and women who are willing to assume that birth and death mark the boundary lines of existence; for them whatever is to be said of religion and ethics and morality must have these two points for its frame of reference. By their reluctance to speak of anything beyond they admit that there is great uncertainty about life after death. The Latin poet, Catullus, expressed the mood that is familiar enough to us when he wrote:

Suns may set, and suns upon the earth, arise:
As for us when this brief life dies
There is only night, and everlasting sleep.

But now and again we cannot help but ask if that mood does service for all of life. Carlyle, who had presumably made peace with the idea that death draws the curtain upon life, wondered on a starry night: "What if some of us at least are permitted to go on still further" . . . If the truth is to be told we will have to say that even the most modern minded among us cannot escape the charm of that hope "full of immortality." Let tragedy come and that inescapable deathless hope is there. It is a persistent hope that flowers into faith. We are justified in facing chance and change and the fickle fortunes of this world that mark our mortality with confidence in the goodness of a God who has put eternity in our hearts. That hope has always been in the heart of man, at least as long as human records run. For two thousand years men have kept Easter as a celebration of that triumphant love that could not and would not be stopped by death. For two thousand years Easter has been a shout of Victory in the face of Death.

Watch a small boy at the day's end. The chances are that sleep seems to him to be no friend. He wants to play on with the toys about him. But when his weary little body relaxes and the fever of the day's excitement begins to go, then sleep comes and it *is* his friend. Death is like sleep; it is mysterious as sleep is mysterious and it is a token of a kindly Father's love,

(*Continued on page* 16)

The UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN is published four times a year in October, December, March and May, by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship. (*President,* Rev. Paul H. Chapman; *Vice Presidents,* Mr. Marshall I. Stone, Mrs. Herbert Lyman; *Cor. Secretary,* Mr. Ralph Lazzaro; *Rec. Secretary,* Rev. Harry H. Hoehler; *Treasurer,* Mr. Constant Wendell.)

Editorial Board: Rev. Charles C. Forman, Ph.D., Chairman; Rev. Charles E. Park, D.D., S.T.D., Rev. Carl Bihldorff, Rev. Alan G. Deale, Mrs. Herbert Lyman, Mr. Constant Wendell, Mr. Keith F. Warren.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $1.00 a year payable to Treasurer, Constant Wendell, Unitarian Christian Publication Office, 102 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Mass.

Entered as second class matter at Boston Post Office, Oct. 25, 1954.

The Underlying Theology of Unitarian Preaching

Robert W. Haney

The *Unitarian Register* for October of this year quotes seven guides to preaching suggested by the Rev. J. Frank Schulman of Youngstown, Ohio. Among Rev. Schulman's homiletic devices are the following: (1) "you can avoid the humanist-theist controversy by assuming a confusing label—calling yourself a theohumanist or simply an Emersonian"; and (2) "be sufficiently vague [so] that everyone will see his own thoughts in your sermon—no matter that what he thinks flatly contradicts everything you say." As you well know, these facetious suggestions have frequently been followed. For these and other reasons one might think that it is impossible to discover any theology underlying the preaching to be heard in Unitarian churches. It is the purpose of these few paragraphs to attempt to show that, believe it or not, Unitarian sermons do contain a basic theological point of view.

At the outset, however, something should be said about the method of Unitarian theology. It has become commonplace for our leading ministers to define Unitarianism as a process of inquiry. This is a methodological rather than a substantive definition, yet it is valuable as a starting point.

The method of Unitarian theology can best be understood if we think in terms of an analogy. Let us imagine two roads running parallel to each other and leading to the same goal. These roads are so close together that a number of highly specialized filling stations have been built along the narrow strip between them, and these stations service automobiles using both roads. One station sells only gasoline; another, oil; still another, water; a fourth, tires; and so on.

One road we may call the road of revelation, and the other, the road of reason. Each filling station may be equated with one particular ingredient in the religious heritage of Western man: the Bible, the traditions of the Church, direct religious experience, the Sacraments, natural religion, the study of the religious beliefs of other peoples, etc. If we want to bind our analogy as closely as possible to our theological problems we might say that the automobiles which stop at these service stations are nothing more than individual human beings, each with his own special needs and abilities, each viewing life in terms of the road which he has taken.

Unitarians will, without question, be found chugging along the road of reason, but they will not be alone. There will be a good many Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and others jogging along it too. There will be even a few Roman Catholics driving an obviously ancient but now redecorated European car called an Aquinas, but they will have to cut over to the road of revelation fairly early in the trip. What will distinguish the Unitarians will be the amount of time they spend at each service station. Obviously, there will be differences between individual Unitarians, and these differences constitute the cause of the theological tensions existing within our denomination. Especially significant in this regard are the differences between those who favor the Biblical, the non-Christian, and the scientific sources of religious ideas. In general, however, it seems fair to assert that Unitarians will spend less time looking for guidance from the Bible and a great deal more time investigating what other world religions, natural science, and their own inner promptings have to say than will most of their fellow motorists.[1]

Victemized By Our Own Propaganda

One writer on Unitarianism has said that "united in a common quest, but unhampered by dogma, we discover new truth more quickly and discard old errors more easily."[2] Such a statement is common in Unitarian literature and surely points to one fact about our denomination: namely, our open-mindedness. It is too often forgotten, however, that such a statement is apologetic. It merely vindicates the method of Unitarianism; it says nothing about what

[1] See "Personal Religious Values of Unitarians," *Unitarians Face a New Age* (Boston, Commission of Appraisal of the American Unitarian Association, 1936), especially pp. 150-51.

[2] William P. Jenkins, "A Fellowship of Seekers" (Boston, American Unitarian Association, 1954), p. 4.

Unitarians believe at one moment in time. The apologists speak much of the truths which Unitarians have found and of the errors which we are more than willing to discard, but they never bother to tell us what either of these are. It is almost as if we were ashamed to believe in something! We have fallen victims to our own propaganda. We think that we have exhausted the subject when we proudly proclaim that we refuse to be restrained by theological dogmas. When we find our Anglican friends becoming much exercised by the suggestion that a belief in the Devil is of questionable validity we may have good cause to look with a cynical eye on theological statements.[3] Nevertheless, the theological shortcomings of others cannot serve to discredit all theology. It is this error in logic which we are all too likely to make. As a result, we may have become a Church more noted for the social sensitivities of our members and the learning of our ministers than for our having anything positive to say about the God-man relation.

In spite of these facets of our denominational life our sermons do have an underlying theology. We might try to discover what this is by examining the theologies of famous Unitarians of the past—Channing, Emerson, Parker, O. B. Frothingham, *et al.*—but this would require more time and knowledge than we have at our disposal. Without our limitations Unitarian theology may perhaps best be understood by examining it as it exists at this moment in terms of four of the five fundamental questions which serve as the basis for good newspaper reporting: who is preaching; where is he preaching; why is he preaching; and what is he preaching.

(1) Who is preaching? This is an easy question to answer. A Unitarian minister is preaching to other Unitarians or to curious onlookers. The minister is distinguished from his listeners only in that he has come to believe that the ministry is the profession in which he wishes to serve God and his fellow men and has devoted considerable time and money in acquiring an education which will prepare him for his chosen vocation. The Unitarian minister is *primus inter pares*. He is a leader, but he speaks only for himself or for those who agree with him. If he speaks for God as well, it will be in spite of what he says, and neither he nor his congregation is likely to know it. Each sermon is a new expression of a relatively free search for religious meaning. A Unitarian would find it difficult to say with the managing editor of the *Christian Century* that "the sermon is reasoned address about God's address to men."[4]

(2) The question "where is he preaching" can be broken down into two subdivisions: the audience as a collection of individuals and the congregation as a religious community. As far as the audience is concerned, the minister is merely telling to friends or strangers what he has been thinking about and what his conclusions are. What he says is valid only for himself. His listeners can accept it or reject it. They can even stay away from church and perhaps have a more profound religious experience than they would have had by going to hear him. One thing about Unitarian theology now becomes clear. It is characterized by a radical laicism. A clergyman may be respected and revered, but there is no reason to follow him. The God-man relation is without intermediaries. Each individual must face the universe after the manner of one of the shadow-encased figures in the great portraits of Rembrandt—alone, with nothing but his own soul to guide him.

At the same time the minister is addressing a religious community of which he is himself a part. His words are not those of a stranger but rather of a friend who is joined to the congregation by countless emotional, experimental ties. Perhaps the congregation wants only to discuss religion, or perhaps it has as its purpose the worship of that which the members have in common come to consider to be ultimate. Whatever the situation, the minister's words are more than a lecture. They are an expression of the implications of the bonds which unite his listeners. As such they deserve more than casual attention. Were we to continue our comparison between the theological situation and the world of painting we might juxtapose the congregation and its minister and Rembrandt's "Night Watch," or, better still, da Vinci's "Last Supper." Each member of the congregation is still an individual and has no mediators standing between himself and God, but he is related to others who are in the same situation. With them he can seek for

[3] "The Devil in Westminster," *Time*, Oct. 13, 1958, p. 75.
[4] Theodore A. Gill "Sermon," in *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (N.Y., Meridian Books, 1958), p. 347.

answers. From them he can hope for encouragement, coupled undoubtedly with a little gentle chastisement.

From this we would argue that Unitarians have a doctrine of the church, not, indeed, as that doctrine is traditionally understood (that is, as a statement of the fact that the church is a channel for supernatural truths and power), but as that doctrine is an appropriate description of the relations which exist not only among fellow seekers but also among those who share something which they have found.

(3) Why does a minister preach? This is a question which every minister asks himself at least once a week, and if he is a sensible and a sensitive man, once a day. It is not an easy question to answer, for it involves a doctrine of man and much more besides. Channing once summed up his idea of preaching by writing:

> "Let . . . [the minister] hold fast, as one of the great qualifications for his office, a faith in the greatness of the human soul,—that faith which looks beneath the perishing body, beneath the sweat of the laborer, beneath the rags and ignorance of the poor, beneath the vices of the sensual and selfish, and discerns in the depths of the soul a divine principle, a ray of the Infinite Light, which may yet break forth and 'shine as the sun' in the kingdom of God. Let him strive to awaken in men a consciousness of the heavenly treasure within them, a consciousness of possessing what is of more worth than the outward universe . . . Let him speak to men as to beings liberally gifted and made for God. Let him always look round on a congregation with the encouraging trust that he has hearers prepared to respond to the simple, unaffected utterance of great truths, and to the noblest workings of his own mind."[5]

Most Unitarians would probably agree with this interpretation of the nature of man. Hence, for them, preaching is a hortatory device, a reminder of obligations too easily forgotten and perhaps not too readily accepted. From this we must surmise that the generally accepted Unitarian doctrine of man views him as a somewhat recalcitrant creature, but still a noble and valuable bearer of the divine spark, who needs only friendly promptings and good logic to make him a true lover of God.

(4) What the minister preaches is the most difficult question with which we must deal. We certainly can say that Sunday morning sermons will often include the minister's thoughts on the Bible, Jesus, and the prophets. The minister will perhaps speak of politics or of social obligations. He may discourse on what it means to be a member of a church or a fellowship. Surely the minister will talk to his congregation about the implications of the theological ideas heretofore mentioned: that is, the solitary, responsible relation of each individual to the ultimate, the spiritual union which ideally exists among those who worship together, and, more often than not, the potentialities of each man to live a good and a religious life.

Unitarian Theology

Putting these ideas together and forging the necessary links which connect them, we may construct a summary of Unitarian theology somewhat in the following manner. Man is a rational being living in a rationally structured world, the workings of which can be discovered, in large measure, by practical reason. The ultimate power in this world and outside of it is what is commonly called God. To this power man is related directly, as are all other beings, but man, unlike other living organisms, is conscious of his relation and can construct concepts to describe it. Within this rational world and the limitations imposed by his own personal history man is free. Frequently in his freedom man will become alienated from himself, but by the turning of his attention to the power which supports all life he can once again get into right relation with himself and his world. Man has no need of rites or of supernatural events to achieve this right relation. The God-man relation is one of co-operation, not of conflict, and the initiative is largely man's.

Some exponents of Neo-orthodoxy question the Unitarian's right to label these beliefs a theology. They argue that what the Unitarian is doing is standing apart from the God-man relation and trying to analyze it. What we have just outlined, they would object, is a philosophy of religion, not a theology.

To these complaints we must say that Neo-

[5] William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," in *The Works of William Ellery Channing* (Boston, American Unitarian Association, 1901), p. 301.

orthodoxy has upon occasion equated theology with the examination of Christian doctrine and, hence, has failed to perceive the existence of theological circles which may intersect the Christian one, but which never merge completely with it. More significant, however, is the fact that very often Unitarians refuse to recognize that they themselves have their own theological circle. Liberal religion is often looked upon as the science of the divine, with science not simply meaning ordered knowledge, but rather an objective empirical study. It is no such thing. Unitarians have a faith as do all other religious people. Perhaps the only difference between us is that we Unitarians are a little more cautious than some in deciding where our faith is to be placed. Unitarian theology is based upon a world-view which may or may not be true. Like other world-views it is heuristic, that is, it is a compelling construct without logical necessity and should serve merely as a guide to further thought and examination. The heuristic character of Unitarian belief is admirably illustrated by the statement that a Unitarian is a seeker.

Do We Have An Adequate Theology ?

Perhaps these paragraphs should be drawn together at this point by a concluding sentence or two, but for the sake of meaningful discussion we might allow one more question to raise its ugly head. How adequate is the underlying theology which Unitarians have adopted?

The Neo-orthodox would argue that our theology is without inner dynamic, overly optimistic, and anthropocentric. In these criticisms one may find considerable merit. Not merely to reply to these charges but also to plug some of the holes in our world-view we might suggest two additions to the armory of Unitarian theology. It does not seem unfair to say that at present Unitarian theology is in the same half-completed state as the funeral pall which Penelope kept weaving and unraveling as she awaited the return of Odysseus. The simile is all the more pertinent, since one has the feeling that at times Unitarians believe a well-developed theology, heuristic though it may be, will automatically become a shroud for any religious movement.

The theological categories which we might suggest to be included in Unitarian thought are those of *grace* and its opposite, *sin*. These were dropped in the great reaction against Calvinism, and certainly no one wants them brought back in their old Calvinist garb. Without some doctrine of grace and of sin, however, Unitarianism may be doomed to being irrelevant.

Grace we would define not as a supernatural power but as a purely natural force which, nevertheless, is so overlaid by artificial structures that only occasionally are we reminded of its existence. By its rarity it has come to be regarded as a divine gift, which it is only in the sense that all creation may be viewed as a divine gift. Grace is not dependent upon ceremonies; it is not purposefully given to some and withheld from others. It is a stream available to all, with an inner dynamic of its own. It is the spiritual oil which makes the workings of the world bearable and renders the relationships of human beings something more than the barterings of selfishness. In sum, the manifestations of grace are best described in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians.

The artificial structures to which we have referred we would call structures of sin. Many of these are necessary for the continuation of human life on this planet. Others arise out of the very nature of man as a being whose development unavoidably involves alienation from God. Thus, sin itself is an inevitable aspect of human existence. Prof. Tillich has written that

> "man is grounded in [the divine life] . . ., but he is not kept within the ground. Man has left the ground in order to 'stand upon' himself, to actualize what he essentially is, in order to be *finite freedom*. . . . Fully developed creatureliness is fallen creatureliness."[6]

Rumor has it that Tillich has summed up this idea by saying that "the Fall and the Creation are one." This statement might serve as the motto for our understanding of sin. Sin, as Augustine noted, is a turning to the self and an ignoring of everything and everybody external to the self, God included. It is an inclination to give supreme importance to that which is finite and essentially subordinate to something else. This definition has in general discourse been replaced by a false equation of sin with

(*Continued on page* 13)

[6] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago, 1951), p. 255.

Functional Merger Favored

Lawrence Marvin Jaffa

I John 3: 18, 19 "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."

As we earnestly seek for enlightenment upon the question of Merger, as we review and analyze the alternatives that have been delineated so painstakingly by the Joint Commission, let us keep in mind that we may know we are of the truth only as we love in deed. Let us advance the arguments for our preferred choice assigning the same purity of motives to our colleagues who choose differently as we desire they should attribute to us. The work of the Joint Commission on Merger merits the sincere thanks of every Unitarian and Universalist. To claim, as Rev. Lon Ray Call has in "Shall Unitarians and Universalists Unite?", that the Commission has an obvious bias, is really to say that it has studied the situation thoroughly and discharged its appointed duty well. As I read the Manual produced I have been impressed by the extreme permissiveness of the approach, the language, and the open-ended list of alternatives. I do not agree that all the "advantages" listed are truly advantageous nor do I feel all the "disadvantages" are detrimental but I do think the list of factors is comprehensive—yea, almost exhaustive! We may evaluate the attributes of varying alternatives differently but we should not doubt the scrupulousness with which all identifiable elements have been explained. The preparation of the comprehensive Manual and Study Guide places upon each of us an obligation which can be repaid only if each member of every affiliated Church and Fellowship carefully considers these two commendable booklets. In the meantime, while every member exercises his prerogatives to read and decide for himself, let me advocate, without mitigation of my own view, complete Functional Merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. I favor Functional Merger because I believe it is the best of the six alternatives offered.

My vote in favor of Functional Merger will be cast with enthusiasm, without reluctance and free of any feeling of compromise for "second best." I favor accomplishing this merger with dispatch. My support for Functional Merger is based upon five categories of reasons. As listed here these reasons are in what seems to me an ascending order of importance. (The fifth point especially seems more important than those which precede.)

The categories of supporting reasons are: 1. Organizational. 2. Personal-Experiential. 3. Practical. 4. Historical. 5. Theological. Undergirding all these reasons is the quatrain of the great Universalist Edwin Markham,

> He drew a circle that shut me out—
> Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
> But Love and I had the wit to win.
> We drew a circle that took him in!

It is in this spirit that I urge your earnest, considered support for complete functional merger, now.

Merger Is An Accomplished Fact

It is my contention that Unitarians and Universalists are in fact organizationally united. The degree of cooperation achieved in the last decade is so extensive in practice that we have now but to place the legal label or sanction on our existing Union. I say this because Unitarians and Universalists have been using the same Hymn Book for a generation. Our Religious Education programs utilize the same curriculum. Our Youth are now served by one organization and our Publications are increasingly unified.

For years our ministers have been trained in each other's schools and served each other's churches. Many Unitarians have taken Reciprocal or Secondary Fellowship in the Universalist Church, Ministerial Associations have held joint meetings or become one functional group.

Geographical conferences have cooperated

and ultimately merged and finally the two denominations have held joint conventions successfully.

At the local level we now have over a score of hyphenated Churches that offer a pattern for the future.

To summarize: if we can sing; pray; educate; publish; recruit, train and Fellowship our Ministers; confer and operate cooperatively isn't the legal separation more a fiction than a fact? We often say in our marriage ceremony that marriage is an institution created by the faithful love of two people which the church can bless only and only the State make legal. We have created a loving Union and seen it blessed; now let us "re-incorporate" for legal sanction of our obvious intentions.

I favor functional merger because I am a "merged" man. I invited a representative of the Massachusetts Universalist convention to sit on my ordaining council 10 years ago. I sought and was granted Fellowship with the Universalists during the early years of my ministry. I was secretary of the Plymouth Bay Ministerial Association when Unitarian and Universalist Ministers met together and merged. We were happy that the local churches there of our two denominations voted to effect merger in 1951.

Presently I serve a Unitarian-Universalist Congregation in which some members are justly proud of their Unitarian heritage and others equally affirmative of Universalism. We look forward to progress strengthened by our mutual devotion. (Here we would agree with Rev. Mr. Call, and take issue with the commission, we want to *keep both names.* We tried using the name "The Liberal Church" and found it was too ambiguous and failed to communicate. Our Public Relations as "The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Fresno" have been much more rewarding and we are encouraged by the recent statement of Dr. Dana McLean Greeley that it is his strong feeling that both names should be preserved as the Unitarian-Universalist Association of America.)

Thus it has been my happy experience to know united congregations, to have "dual" Fellowship and to feel an increased effectiveness by this identity so I urge for our continental advance the pattern with which I have seen local success and invigoration.

Third, and because of my first and second reasons, I feel that we will be able to make a more efficient financial program, bear a more effective witness both as ministers and laymen and contribute larger humanitarian service as a functionally unified church. Specifically the duplication of effort in thought, design, printing, mailing, collecting, recording, tabulating, charting and reporting both the Unified Universalist Appeal and the United Unitarian Appeal seems a tragic misapplication of financial, intellectual and morale resources. I do *not* propose to save money by merger. I propose that it will result in a higher percentage of contribution utilization for advance and a lower percentage for overhead than is possible under the present set-up.

What I have detailed for the appeals is also true, I believe, for the operation of, information about, and programming of, projects for two service committees when one could encompass the same or even an expanded program when freed from *double* costs.

I enjoy my "dual" Fellowship but I see little difference in the two sets of packets I receive and the two professional dues are increasingly hard to meet as each association aspires to progress.

Eliminate Council of Liberal Churches

In my particular area the lack of geographical congruity constitutes a special problem as the Unitarian Conference includes the whole Pacific Coast whereas the Universalist Convention is for California alone so I find it necessary to participate in two sets of meetings which often duplicate rather than complement each other. I feel one merged organization will create a unified structure which will remedy this. I feel that functional merger of the Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church can eliminate the necessity for the "third headquarters" presently embodied in the superstructure of the "Council of Liberal Churches" and will thus enable key personnel to act creatively without a check through "triple channels." Perhaps it also may be hoped that by combining headquarters the best calibre of leadership may be assigned to specific responsibilities without having to "keep things even." Again I envision the need for *more funds* after the merger but the probability that a unified administration can reduce some operating cost to release more of our assets for creative advance. (We can spend less on inter-office memos and more on dynamic advertising.)

The practical reasons for merger are very dramatic to our church when we receive 4 copies of the same mailings, one each to lay officer and minister from Unitarians and Universalists. Economy is not a Crusader's argument: I do not want to spend less for our movement I want to see our increased giving gain increased benefits. I believe functional merger will facilitate this aim. The ultimate success of the Denominational Development Fund may depend on this.

Turning to historical considerations I would remind you of the excellent article by Rev. Mr. Carl Scovel in the Fall 1958 issue of *The Unitarian Christian.* By reporting on the 16th Congress of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom Mr. Scovel has highlighted one of the historic dilemmas, viz., how to reconcile the urge to be Universal with the desire to be unique. The report of the Joint Commission on Merger sites attempts to merge in 1865, 1867, 1899, 1908, 1923 and 1931, before the present negotiations began. In many instances a desire to be more inclusive stopped the plan to merge our two denominations. The Rev. Mr. Donald Harrington of the Community Church of New York is a contemporary spokesman, through the Jan. 4th issue of his bulletin, for the kind of Universal Religion which has been affirmed throughout history but which Mr. Scovel has wisely noted can derive a narrower sectarianism than any of its component sects as it becomes either Universal Ethics or Universal Theism. All ecclectics use a criteria for inclusion which does not permit the adoption of all of any faith. (Mr. Harrington's formulation does provide a sound basis for discussion but to my view adds little that is not inherent in the present A.U.A. statement of purpose and the Universalist Profession of Faith of 1935.) The point which is germane here, however, is this: there is an historic trend to merge, to cooperate. This urge has been frustrated by the magnitude of its pretensions. (It is something like the recruit who sat immobilized before the towering stack of potatoes he had to peel until the Sgt. advised, "It goes a lot quicker if you peel them one at a time, son.") Let's cooperate where we can, and not postpone a possible merger because all the world's religions aren't going to be included.

Historically, there is an urge to be free of the trivial in order to affirm the transcendental. Lincoln said, "If the Church would ask simply for assent to the Savior's statement of the substance of the law: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.'—that church would I gladly unite with." Let's effect merger upon this basis of simplicity. Let us not let it fail because of percentages of urban and rural strength or calculations of the ratios of contributions to potential demands. Let us effect a merger of two churches which share a heritage. Let us not be so anxious to "exclude no one" that we become "nothing." Let us remember, as Karl Deutsch recently cautioned in the Register, that we must preserve our own identity even as we seek to understand others. I believe that effective merger *now* will call for a vital reaffirmation of the strengths and insights which are unique to Unitarianism and Universalism and foster the depth of thinking which has been, historically, one of our greatest contributions.

Theological Concern Supports Merger

I have, finally, some very strong theological reasons for desiring merger, which are personal, to be sure, but which may be shared by many readers. William Ellery Channing wrote, in his discourse on "The Church," "All Christians and myself form one body, one church, just as far as common love and piety possess our hearts. Nothing is more real than this spiritual union." If we aspire to the unity of all mankind let us take the first step joyously and unite with those in closest fellowship and hope that the consummation of this desire will inspire a widening of our opportunities for sound union. The present state of humanity indicates an urgent need for the vociferous proclamation of our Universalist Gospel of the "Ultimate harmony of all souls with God" and our Unitarian Faith in the *Unity* of God. Let's be about our major task of bringing light to those in darkness. We can affirm this message better together. Our religion which is based upon "Salvation by Character" and the "Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever," "The Supreme Worth and Dignity of every Human Being" and "The Authority of Truth, Known or to be Known" can command the allegiance of millions who have been degraded by some form of determinism until they dare not call their souls their own. We do dare so to do because we

know whose children we are. A united Unitarian-Universalist Church can affirm this good news with increased courage. Let us transcend all rancor of the past and "love in deed and in truth." Let us hasten to a merger that can enable us to witness, to worship, to serve better than we have done divided.

Unitarianism and Universalism need each other for the most complete expression of our Faith. Unity and Universality are the key words of the future. Let us make them *both* our own. Let's draw now the circle that includes. With Channing let us "not condemn the union of ourselves to these or any other churches whose doctrines we approve, provided that we do it without severing ourselves in the least from the Universal Church . . .". It is creeds that have divided, it is love that unites "and hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him."

Some Intangibles in the Question of Merger

Albert F. Ziegler

It is my hope that in the current plebescite, and in later votes, Universalists will vote to continue the separate existence of the Universalist Church of America. I hope that it will not so much be a rejection of merger with the American Unitarian Association as an acceptance of the peculiar mission of Universalism, and a determination to make the Universalist Church of America a strong, growing vehicle of that faith.

This hope is deep but by no means desperate. If the vote is for merger, and merger is effected, I do not have any feeling that this would be a disaster. The real force of the Church is not in the area of a national headquarters, but in the local Church and individual people. But, it is a strong hope, because while the national organization cannot determine the faith and fate on the local level, it can help or make it hard for the several Churches by amplifying their efforts or by putting them in a position of having to oppose, even guard against, the work of the denomination. Differences arise between the enthusiasms of some local Churches and the emphasis of the denomination quite apart from a merged situation; how much more would this be so in a merger.

My hope does not arise in any degree out of a lack of appreciation of the excellence of the faith and work of the American Unitarian Association, but out of a conviction that there is a difference between these and the faith and work that should be engaging the attention of Universalists. I believe there is a difference, and should be, between the Universalist Church and the Unitarian Church. Putting the institutions aside for the moment, there is of course a difference between Universalism and Unitarianism. Whether or not the Churches still represent the gospels from which they derived their names and traditional characters, the gospels would seem to merit some attention in such a profound action as merger.

Universalism Not Unitarianism

Objectively, Universalism is "the doctrine or belief that all men eventually will be saved, or restored to holiness and happiness." Unitarianism is a denial "of the Trinity, believing that God exists in only one person." One may well say that my dictionary is an old one, but neither Universalists nor Unitarians have thought creatively in the area of theology since that time. However expressed, the area of theological

interest of Universalism is in the universality of divine concern and benefits; that of Unitarianism, in the nature of the deity. It is not necessary to Unitarianism that the one God's blessings be assured to all; it is not necessary to Universalism that the God whose benefits are assured to all be single or multiple in person. Many Unitarians were and are "partialists"; some Universalists were and are trinitarian.

These were the gospels that gave birth to the Churches; two different gospels, two different Churches. Through the years, the Churches did not stand still in their teachings. Both have moved from at least the traditional expression of their gospels. Some proponents of merger now minimize the whole question of a theological difference between the Churches, on the basis that Universalists and Unitarians have grown to be so close in thinking and teaching that there is in fact no important theological difference. If so, and there surely is some basis for this stand, it is not as comforting a fact for Universalism as might be thought. While it is true that many Universalists have become more like what Unitarianism is and was; it is not evident that Unitarians have moved closer to what Universalism was and fundamentally now is. In short, if we are so close today, it is because Universalists have moved away from their peculiar faith toward Unitarianism. This is a matter of great regret to me; not that they have become more Unitarian, but that they have become less Universalist.

But, I am not convinced that the difference has been reduced to insignificance and therein lies the basis for my hope. With all the superficial resemblances between present day Universalist practice and thought and Unitarian practice and thought, there is a fundamental, if tenuous, difference. It is a difference in climate; it is general, but not universal; specific, but not tangible; tenuous, but definite.

Distinctions That Matter

Universalists are "confident"; Unitarians "search". This is not to say that Unitarians are not confident in their searching; but the confidence depends on the searching; the searching is the important emphasis. This is not to say the Universalists do not search, but our confidence does not depend on searching. We are confident even before searching; even if, in the searching, we do not find. It is a difference of emphasis, and yet a difference in the basic nature of the faith. If the searching results in a denial of the confidence, a true Unitarian would therefore doubt; a true Universalist will hold to his confidence still; though he may change the terms in which it is expressed.

On this slight but vital difference, hangs my hope that in a continued independent existence of the Universalist Church there may be a return to the full power of the faith in a dynamic modern expression. Can not a merged denomination serve Churches of different characters representing both adequately? It does not seem likely to me. Our Departments of Education have been merged for some years, as have our youth organizations. What has been the experience, from which we may project a probable experience in total merger?

Universalism Doesn't Matter

In the years that we have been served by the merged Education Department, there has not been any measurable change in the curriculum offered from the time when it was issued to serve the Unitarian Churches alone. The assumption of the Department is that we are all alike, or should be, in direction and intent; Universalism equals Unitarianism. In the years that the Liberal Religious Youth has existed there has been no advance in understanding of a devotion to Universalism on the part of even the Universalist young people. It has been the boast of LRY enthusiasts that the youth claim to be neither Universalist nor Unitarian but "liberal"; which strikes one who looks for a growing Universalism as a "heckuva way to run a railroad."

In brief, my complaint is that, in a merged situation, Universalists do not make a difference. Whose fault is that? the Universalists', of course. It comes about, I believe, 1. because we are organizationally informal by nature; 2. because we are more anxious to cooperate than to ensure the differences we represent; and 3. because we are not ourselves enough aware that there are differences to ensure.

Editor's Mail Box

[The Editor welcomes correspondence from readers of *The Unitarian Christian.* Such correspondence as may be of general interest will appear in this column.]

Sir:

The statement which I have written for my January Bulletin contains in capsule form my thinking on merger.

I have the greatest respect for the Unitarian Church. I firmly believe that Liberal Christianity will be much stronger for a distinct Unitarian and Universalist Church. I have told many Unitarians I would do everything to further their cause while I would be doing everything to further our cause.

I sincerely hope that our two people will work together, help each other, grow strong, but realize the major emphasis of each has a particular message.

Sincerely yours,

Seth R. Brooks, Minister
Universalist National Memorial Church
Washington, D.C.

[Below is Dr. Brooks' Statement. Ed.]

The Universalist Church may well be facing the most momentous and critical hour in its history. As a Denomination me must now answer by vote whether we wish to become one merged movement with a corresponding church, namely, the Unitarian.

There are many reasons why mergers have taken place and will take place. Businesses can unite capital funds, simplify sales, distribution, advertising and centralize their plants.

In education often a small college lacking endowment and enrollment has conserved something by joining with a larger and more affluent institution.

Hospitals may unite in a Center and house under one roof several small hospitals formerly spread over the city. This saves time for doctors and nurses and sometimes brings down the cost of operation.

When we talk about religion we cannot separate our thought from belief, teachings, purpose, polity and the ultimate ideas man holds. If churches merge on a basis of economy or strategy, they have accomplished only that. If they merge on a basis of belief, then it must be clear that there are enough persons with allegiance to enough beliefs commonly held so that the new organization is not just a name.

Unitarians have a distinct set of beliefs and practices, although Unitarians are non creedal. Universalists have a distinct set of beliefs and practices, although Universalists are non creedal. The two are completely different. I have never seen an Unitarian Church (true to its purpose) which has said it was a Universalist Church nor have I ever seen a Universalist Church (true to its purpose) which has said it was a Unitarian Church. *This to me is the ultimate answer to our problem.*

A merged church will either wipe out historic Unitarianism and Universalism, exist with one or the other in the ascendancy and in dominant control or it will be a church that is so broad and so inclusive that it represents little more than our right to disagree, our general agreement that good is more attractive than evil and that men are somehow wiser to live together amiably than in hostility. The hour is here for both denominations to avoid fanciful thinking and to face the realities of a hard road alone but maybe a ruinous road together, because along it the historic guideposts of both faiths have of necessity been removed.

S. R. B.

Sir:

I am a Liberal Christian Universalist and do not plan to "hide my light under a bushel." Also, if there is any marked difference between a Liberal Christian Unitarian and a Liberal Christian Universalist I would like to be informed.

I am enclosing $1. Subscription to the magazine published by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship.

Keep up the good work for the Cause.

Sincerely,
Harold C. Perham
Sec'y National Association of Universalist Men.

Sir:

I intend to continue subscribing for the magazine and wish that I could contribute more to the work of the Fellowship.

Berlie T. Tucker
Petal, Mississippi

Dear Sir:

Mrs. Wright and I and a majority of our people are disturbed by recent humanist developments in the denomination. Whereas, in our federated set-up, many are now calling themselves Congregationalists, we prefer to call ourselves Unitarian Christians.

We understand that you publish an organ and pamphlets to this end and would appreciate your putting us on your mailing list.

Sincerely yours,
H. W.

Sir:

I am writing to tell you what a gratifying experience it was to find in the Packet this morning a copy of *The Unitarian Christian* with such refreshing content. . . .

I thought the report by Carl Scovel to be very discerning—very refreshing to read after so much of the syncretistic sentiment which seems to be the official Unitarian line. The Stokes article was also especially discerning . . . on the subject of Communion. Keep up this standard, and the Unitarian Christian movement will bear fruit.

Sincerely yours,
Edward W. Ohrenstein
Winslow, Wash.

Dear Sirs:

I have just finished reading a copy of *The Unitarian Christian* and I would like to let you know how much I admire and appreciate your publication.

I am enclosing $2.50 for membership in your fellowship and your magazine.

Sincerely,
Jack T. Callender
Louisville, Ky.

Avowal of Faith of the Universalist Church

"We avow our faith: in God as Eternal and All-Conquering Love: In the Spiritual Leadership of Jesus: In the Supreme Worth of every Human Personality; In the Authority of Truth known or to be known; In the Power of men of Good-Will and a Sacrificial Spirit to overcome all evil and progressively to establish the Kingdom of God."

UNDERLYING THEOLOGY

(*Continued from page* 6)

particular acts. But sin is a state, just as grace is a state. It has its own impetus, as does grace. Unethical or ethical actions are merely expressions of the state and of the power. As such they should not be given undue significance.

A doctrine of sin can serve many purposes. Perhaps chief among them is the fact that it reminds us of the necessity of being critical of institutions and of men whom we might otherwise be all too willing to canonize. This doctrine also leads us to reconsider what we can expect of men and their creations. It *can* be one of the most vigorous opponents of legalistic moralizing.

We have argued that Unitarian preaching does, in fact, have a theology, May Meetings notwithstanding. This theology is something more than an expression of a theological least common denominator. It is potentially persuasive and powerful. However, it is incomplete. While open-ended thinking is desirable, it should not become a substitute for responsible reflection.

A Question on the Purposes of Merger

Rev. Carl Bihldorff
First Parish in Brookline, Massachusetts

Before the Unitarian and Universalist denominations vote on the question of merger, I believe that their churches ought first to know and to declare what special purposes their merger would promote and serve, and not wait till after the die is cast.

The Manual on Merger and Alternatives states that "It should be remembered that by-laws are very important since they constitute the main framework on which all else rests, hence they have top priority." However, the only priority given this basic issue by the Joint Commission on Merger is that this matter would be resolved after the question of merger is voted on. It strikes me that we are putting the cart before the horse.

The present purposes of our two denominations are described and defined in their constitutions and by-laws. Would it be wise to waive or abrogate these purposes for the sake of merger and then, after merger, wrestle with the problem of our collective purpose? The founding fathers of this country had certain convictions and purposes which they stated in the Declaration of Independence before this nation was born. If our two denominations vote to merge, what will their expressed purposes be?

A religious fellowship must be dedicated to meaningful and specific propositions if it hopes to survive as a living organism. Vague generalities would lead only to ambiguity and weakness. The wisdom of history tells us that a religious movement must have a purpose, a loyalty, and a concern. What would ours be? Is the word "freedom" enough to unite us? "Freedom" for what?

Are Unitarians and Universalists interested in merger merely for the sake of efficiency and of growth? Or do we have distinctive functions which can be better fulfilled together than apart?

If these functions and purposes are named and defined, and if our two fellowships ratify them, then we would know what merger would mean. But to unite as "liberals" or "conservatives," or "free-thinkers," or "good friends" without a defined purpose may invite so many tempests and turmoils as to lead to future schism.

There may be basic agreements among most Universalist and Unitarian members but, unless those agreements are defined in religious terms, we shall become little more than another ethical society which, I do not believe, is the desire of either denomination.

Words still have deep and decisive meanings to men. If love to God and love to man are obsolete ideas, then let us be brave and declare it. But before we vote on merger, let us know what purposes we would merge around to support and serve.

Notice of Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship will be held on Wednesday evening, April 8, 1959 at 7:30 at the First Church in Boston. Dinner, preceding the Meeting, will be at 6:30 P.M. Tickets for the dinner are $1.50 and are available by calling or writing Mr. Constant Wendell, 102 Mt. Vernon St., Boston 8. Of special interest will be the discussion pertaining to incorporation and action relative thereto. Reports for the year, presentation of a budget and election of officers and directors for the coming year are other agenda items. Following the business of the meeting Mr. Arthur T. Lyman, former Commissioner of Correction in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will address the Fellowship. The following names have been proposed for officers and directors by the Nominating Committee:

Honorary President, Mr. Robert H. Loomis.

President, Rev. Paul H. Chapman.

Vice Presidents, Mr. Marshall I. Stone, Mrs. Herbert Lyman.

Corresponding Secretary, Mr. Ralph Lazzaro.

Recording Secretary, Rev. Harry H. Hoehler.

Treasurer, Mr. Constant Wendell.

Directors to 1962: Mrs. Theodore C. Brown, Mr. Keith F. Warren. Director-at-large, Mr. Harry M. Stokes.

H. H. H.

From The President's Desk

Sparked by the "Detective Story" manner of their discovery and purchase, the chance finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the middle of this century has aroused the interest of the whole world. Their importance consists in the valuable new facts about the religious life of Palestine directly preceding and during the first years of the Christian era. After having been hidden for nearly two thousand years, these scrolls gave us new knowledge about these people who preserved the Bible manuscripts.

Another discovery, two years previous to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, is equally significant and may prove to be more important in the understanding of Early Christianity. In 1945, peasants in the neighborhood of Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt, discovered a Gnostic library of 48 works, written in the Coptic language, and dating from the second century A.D. Like the Dead Sea Scrolls these manuscripts were preserved in large pottery jars. A brief description by several scholars in 1948 forwarded to the Institut de France was the only public notice, then they disappeared from sight. Later it was discovered that twelve of the Codices (manuscripts) had been deposited in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, where they have not been available to scholars. The thirteenth, however, became separated from the others. This Coptic Codex of 100 pages contains four unknown writings of the second century A.D., one of them a heretical Gospel. These 100 pages, for the most part numbered, contain: a Letter of James; the Gospel of Truth; a Letter to Rheginos; a Treatise on the Three Natures; and two very damaged pages of the Prayer of the Apostles. These ancient manuscripts throw light on the terrific struggle between early Christianity and Gnosticism. When access is given to those in the Cairo Museum it is believed that scholars can give us a better understanding of the transition from primitive Christianity to early Catholicism. At the present time our chief source of information is this newly recovered Gnostic papyrus known as the "Jung Codex" which was translated and studies of which have been edited by F. L. Cross.

Like the Dead Sea Scrolls these documents will open up a lot of new thinking and give to modern men a picture of the battle between early Christian theology and rationalism and mysticism.

It seems very appropriate in this time of ferment in the theological world that at our Unitarian Christian Fellowship Supper on May 24 at the Old South Church Parish House in Boston we should be privileged to hear four of our young ministers discuss "New Thinking Among Unitarian Christians." Do plan to be with us at this time.

P. H. C.

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

102 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston 8, Mass.

Enclosed is $3. Please enroll me as a member of the Fellowship and send me the *Unitarian Christian* for one year.

Name .....

Address .....

Editorial

(*Continued from page* 2)

given for the refreshment of a new day when we wake again. That is what the Christian faith has always taught. Jesus saw life as continuity which death could interrupt but never end. "In my father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . ." So we hear him speak and see him smile at death, move out of the darkness and into the light of his Father's house. Christianity bids us think of heavenly abodes as stages in a pilgrimage. Thus there is an authentically Christian ring to Mansfield's lines:

> And may we find, when ended is the page
> Death but a tavern on our pilgrimage.

There is Jesus, the master of men, the one in whose face the plan of God was most fully mirrored. By precept and example he showed us that eternity begins whenever and wherever we transcend the present dimensions of our living and let our souls stretch Godward.

Wherever a man or a woman stands a little taller, lives with a bit of abandon and a generous extravagence of spirit, carries a burden that is of another's making, and not for duty's sake but for a mad kind of goodness that always walks the second mile—and gladly, there is eternity begun. There we see again the kind of living that spells victory and can never be erased.

Of course the cross was not the end for Jesus, and there was no grave that could possibly hold him. Easter is no mystery when you think of it in terms like these. Death is not the end—if we choose it there is eternal life and the shelter of a loving God in whose hands we all are held.

— C. C. F.

An 'Ancient Prayer'

From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth,
From the laziness that is content with half-truths,
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,
O God of Truth, deliver us.

Introducing Our Contributors

ROBERT W. HANEY is a senior at the Harvard Divinity School where he is preparing for the Unitarian ministry. A member of the First Unitarian Church of New Bedford, Massachusetts, he is Director of Religious Education at the First Church in Boston.

LAWRENCE MARVIN JAFFA is a graduate of the University of California and the Harvard Divinity School. He was ordained in 1949 and since 1954 has been minister of The Liberal Church, Universalist-Unitarian, of Fresno, California, and the Unitarian Fellowship of Stanislaus County, Modesto, California.

ALBERT F. ZIEGLER is a graduate of Tufts University and the Crane Theological School. He has served Universalist Churches in Wakefield, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island, before going to the First Universalist Church of Melrose, Massachusetts, a month ago.